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ABSTRACT

The social studies teacher should assist pupils in developing meaningful learnings. A teacher can achieve such a goal by building on interests that students already have in the social studies. It also is necessary to provide for individual differences among elementary school children. The learner must perceive a purpose and must be able to succeed. In addition, important learnings developed by pupils may be forgotten or become vague unless opportunities are presented to utilize what has been learned. The modern social studies program must balance objectives pertaining to understandings, skills, and attitudes. Teachers must accept all pupils as being important. Societal trends help determine specific units that may be taught. There must be ample justification for each unit of study. Determining such justification would assist the instructor in weeding out unimportant units, a task made increasingly necessary by the ever increasing amount of knowledge available to human beings. The skills of good human relations, problem solving, critical thinking, and creative thinking are important skills for students to develop in becoming effective citizens in the U.S. democracy. A large number of important contemporary issues are cited as particularly appropriate for the social studies curriculum in American classrooms today, and teaching/curriculum problems for consideration and discussion by practitioners are outlined as well. (Contains 13 selected references.) (LBG)

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RECENT TRENDS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES

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RECENT TRENDS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES

Which criteria or standards may be listed for a relevant elementary school social studies curriculum? Which objectives are important for pupils to realize in social studies? Which methods should a good social studies teacher emphasize in teaching pupils? How can pupils be assisted to realize their optimum development in social studies? How can pupil achievement be effectively evaluated in the social studies? These questions, among others, are important when considering improving the social studies curriculum.

Hennings, Hennings, and Banich [1] indicate the following changes which affected social studies education in the 1980's:

> Increased public attention to cultural literacy and to education for democratic citizenship has led educators to propose that there is a body of knowledge that all people must possess if they are to function as free men and women.
>
> Heightened awareness of such global problems as rapid growth in population, depletion of world energy resources, insufficient food in parts of the world, and pollution of the environment has prompted educators to stress the interdependency of all peoples in the world.
>
> More attention to the teaching of skills across the curriculum and the realization that the best time to teach children reading and writing strategies is as they need them to investigate content areas have caused educators to emphasize the importance of integrating content and skills and of integrating the subject areas of the curriculum.

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[1] Serafina Fiore Banich, Dorothy Grant Hennings, and George Hennings. Today's Elementary Social Studies. Second Edition. St. Louis: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989, page xiii.

Guidelines for Teaching the Social Studies

The social studies teacher should assist pupils in developing meaningful learnings. If pupils are reading content, they must understand what is read. Content that is too difficult for a pupil to read, generally, will make for feelings of frustration and a lack of achievement. Content, excessively easy, makes for boredom in learning. Reading materials that are on the understanding level of a child should make for optimum achievement. Thus, the pupil attaches meaning to what has been learned. If the content is excessively easy for the learner to read, new subject matter will not be acquired and a lack of interest may set in. Other learning activities, such as the use of films, filmstrips, video-tapes, and slides, should also assist in providing meaningful content for pupils. The content of these activities needs to be understood by pupils. The social studies teacher must have much knowledge about each child in such areas as capacity, achievement, interests, motivation, and background experience. This information needs to be utilized in selecting objectives which pupils can realize and learning activities which will be meaningful to the learner.

The social studies teacher needs to build on interests that pupils have, presently, in the social studies. Some pupils, for example, may have traveled to a given region and this area is now being studied in a social studies unit. These pupils, no doubt, will be highly interested in relating their personal experiences to the ongoing unit. They may have related pictures, snapshots, slides, and articles which can be shared with other pupils in the classroom. Thus, it may be relatively

easy for these pupils to identify with and relate to the ongoing social studies unit.

The teacher of elementary school social studies needs to develop new interests within pupils. To initiate a unit, an attractive and interesting bulletin board display may be prepared. A learning center containing models or articles pertaining to the new unit should stimulate pupil interest in having an inward desire to learn. Library books relating to the new unit, being placed on a reading table, may also help to arouse the interests of the learner. The teacher may wish to introduce selected library books to pupils by telling some related interesting happenings in these books. A carefully chosen video-tape or filmstrip may be shown when initiating a unit in social studies to develop interests of pupils.

Eisner[2] wrote:

> The admonition to build on the child's interest is often made as a corrective for educational programs that neglect them as sources of curriculum aims and content. Traditional educational programs are developed out of principles that identify educational value within particular subject matters or disciplines. Becoming educated means learning how to use the ideas within these disciplines. This approach, it is argued, has two educationally devastating consequences. First, it is often irrelevant to the child. Second, it fails to cultivate the child's idiosyncracy by providing few opportunities that are of particular importance to the individual child.

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[2]Elliot W. Eisner. The Educational Imagination. Second Edition. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985, page 70.

The learner must perceive purpose in learning. A child cannot be asked merely to read a certain number of pages from a textbook with no purpose on the learner's part involved. Pupils should read to answer questions which they want answered. Thus, a purpose exists in the mind of the pupil for the reading activity. When pupils are to take an excursion with teacher guidance, information needs to be obtained pertaining to questions that pupils wish to have answered. In this way, pupils feel that purposes are involved in taking the excursion; the purposes are to obtain answers to important questions which could not be effectively obtained through a different learning activity. The classroom teacher needs to think of teaching strategies whereby the learning activities that pupils are engaged in provide situations for the raising of meaningful questions. The child then has an inward desire to learn which, in this situation, would involve the gathering of information in the solving of problems.

Pupils should be successful learners in the social studies curriculum. Learning activities that are too difficult, generally, make for feelings of failure on the part of pupils. If learning activities are excessively easy for pupils, perhaps, very few new learnings are then developed by pupils. The social studies curriculum must provide opportunities whereby pupils are successful in learning and at the same time new learnings are being developed. In introducing a unit to pupils, good teaching strategy necessitates preassessing pupils' background knowledge. In other words, the teacher needs to utilize appropriate evaluation techniques to determine where pupils are

presently pertaining to background knowledge relating to the new unit. Thus, the teacher obtains data in adjusting the social studies curriculum to the present achievement level of each pupil. For example, in teaching a unit pertaining to the farm, pupils living on farms or in rural areas should generally have more background knowledge than would children living in urban areas. Pupils living in urban areas may have more background knowledge pertaining to a unit dealing with living in the city than would those pupils living on farms. There are exceptions to the above statements such as children coming from disadvantaged homes and not having had adequate background experiences, or children not being able to grasp and retain learnings as well as others.

The teacher must provide for individual differences among pupils in elementary school social studies. This means that individual pupils are frequently working on different learning activities. Learning activities that are provided for pupils should guide in realizing their highest potential. To provide for individual differences, selected pupils may realize more complex objectives as compared to others in the classroom. The teacher needs to give some pupils more assistance in learning activities as compared to those who can work more independently with quality results. Materials in the social studies should contain content on a variety of reading levels in the classroom. An adequate number of library books relating to the unit taught should provide for different reading levels that exist in any classroom. Ample opportunities should be provided for enrichment learning for learners who complete given learning activities at a rather rapid pace and yet the completed work is of high quality. All pupils in a class

continuously being taught together using the same learning activity does not provide for individual differences. There must be ample time for pupils to work in committees as well as working individually or independently.

Ample opportunity needs to be provided for pupils to utilize previous learnings in new situations. Understandings, skills, and attitudes that pupils have developed should be utilized in new situations. If pupils, for example, have learned skills pertaining to the use of the card catalog in the centralized library, opportunities must be given to use these skills in a functional situation by actually locating sources of information to solve problem areas. The skill mentioned here, no doubt, would soon be forgotten or become nebulous in the thinking of pupils unless it is utilized in a functional learning activity. Previously developed learnings should be utilized in the school setting as well as in society.

Balance among objectives pertaining to understandings, skills, and attitudes should be emphasized in a modern elementary school social studies program. With an increasing amount of reading materials available for consumption by the reader, it is important to have pupils realize an ample number of major understandings. However, other objectives need also to be adequately emphasized. Equally important for pupils to realize are objectives which pertain to attitudes and feelings of individuals. Negative attitudes and feelings toward the social studies hinder pupils in gaining important facts, generalizations, and concepts. Thus, positive attitudes and feelings assist pupils in realizing objectives dealing with the category of understandings. It is

difficult to separate attitudes and feelings from academic achievement since one category of objectives influences other domains such as objectives dealing with attitudes influencing objectives in the understandings category. Objectives which emphasize skills are also important in the social studies. Reading social studies content with proper comprehension, outlining content, using the card catalog in the central library, giving a good oral report to the class, and being a productive member of a committee are important skills for pupils to develop. Pertaining to skill development, Beane, Toepfer, and Alessi[3] wrote:

> In many cases, objectives in a particular skill area cover a wide range from simple to complex. For example, a mathematics course may involve a sequence of twenty or thirty objectives. In situations like this, learners may be grouped on the basis of which objectives they have already accomplished. Past achievement may place some nearer the beginning of the sequence, some in the middle, and others near the end. It would be inappropriate to approach all these learners simultaneously. Thus, three or more groups might be constructed on the basis of achievement. Grouping on the basis of achievement is also used in the case of advanced courses that follow general, required experiences and that call for high levels of previous achievement. By the same token, remedial courses are generally grouped on the basis of a lack of minimal achievement in general courses.

The teacher of social studies must accept each pupil as an individual. This means that all pupils would be respected regardless of capacity levels, achievement, race, creed, interests, and socioeconomic

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[3]James A. Beane, Conrad F. Toepfer, Jr. and Samuel J. Alessi, Jr. Curriculum Planning and Development. Newton, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1986, page 199.

levels. Individual differences among pupils should be valued highly. For example, in society various kinds and types of work must be completed for the good of all individuals. In society the same or similar accomplishment is not expected of all individuals. People differ in the kind or type of work they can successfully complete. In a modern social studies program, differences in levels of achievement and quality of work are to be expected from elementary school pupils. Expecting pupils to achieve at similar levels would violate respecting the worth of each individual. If the teacher adjusts the social studies curriculum to the level each pupil is working at presently and then guides each child to realize optimal achievement through continuous progress, respect for each human being would thus be in evidence. Each child who is performing better now as compared to previous times can receive praise from the teacher and thus be stimulated to greater efforts. If pupils are not achieving continuous progress in social studies, diagnosis of variables causing this situation needs to be analyzed. Remedying the situation through revised attainable objectives and varied meaningful and interesting learning activities for the pupil is important. The teacher needs to utilize varied valid and reliable evaluation techniques in diagnosing difficulties that pupils experience in school.

Summary on Guidelines for Teaching the Social Studies

Certain principles of learning should be followed by the social studies teacher when teaching pupils. Teachers need to provide meaningful learnings in elementary school social studies. Maintaining

and developing the interests of pupils in social studies units are important. For optimum learning to occur, each pupil needs to feel that purpose is involved. Pupils generally are spurred on to greater efforts when they have been successful in learning activities. Since pupils differ from each other in many ways, the teacher of social studies needs to think of ways to individualize instruction. Important learnings developed by pupils may be forgotten or become vague unless opportunities are presented to utilize what has been learned. To develop pupils to their optimum, three categories of objectives should be emphasized -- understandings, skills, and attitudes. Appropriate balance in these categories of objectives is important in a modern social studies curriculum. Teachers must accept all pupils as being important.

Societal Trends and the Social Studies

Trends in society have important implications in developing the social studies curriculum. These trends assist in determining units to be taught and objectives to be realized by pupils.

One important trend in society is that tension between and among nations continues to exist. What happens in Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and other areas of the world, is important to major world powers. Better and faster means of transportation and communication have made for quicker responses from major nations to crucial happenings in almost any nation on the face of the earth. Weapons of destruction used in modern warfare have become increasingly destructive. What implications does this trend have for a modern elementary school social

studies program? Pupils certainly need to have an ample number of units which pertain to nations which are leaders on the national scene. Secondly, units need to be taught which deal with areas where major problems exist between and among nations, such as Israel and the Arab World. Also, pupils need to be able to engage in problem solving activities whereby solutions to disagreements among nations are sought. Each solution needs to be based on adequate knowledge. The consequences of each plan of action need to be thouroughly evaluated.

Ochoa[4] wrote:

> Increasing awareness on the part of the public of the promise and potential of global education is a continuing need. Local districts will be responsive where there is a critical mass of community supporters who are vocal in their contacts with school board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers. Recent emphasis on a back-to-basics curriculum makes the task of raising public and community awareness an especially challenging one.

A second important trend in society is strife and a lack of harmony among and between the races. This has made for situations involving violence, the loss of lives, and the destruction of property. Minority groups have not received the respect due in the areas of education, jobs, and housing. Attitudes toward minority groups too frequently have been negative. Implications of this social trend for elementary school social studies would be the following:

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[4]Anna S. Ochoa. Contemporary Initiatives in Social Studies Education. Boca Raton, Florida: Social Issues Resource Series, Inc., 1985, page 126.

1. Pupils need to have an ample number of units pertaining to minority groups such as the Black American, the American Indian, and the Mexican American. Pupils should develop learnings in depth pertaining to the contributions of these minority groups to American society. Emphasis should also be placed upon difficulties that individuals face due to racial discrimination.

2. Pupils should engage in problem solving activities pertaining to ways in which minority groups might gain their rightful status in society.

3. Committee work needs to be emphazed in the classroom. Positive attitudes toward other individuals and their ideas should be exhibited by committee members.

Change in American society is a common occurrence. Each year many new inventions are developed. The inventions assist to make the world of work more pleasant. It eliminates certain types and kinds of work; in many situations, however, new jobs and vocations are created. For example, fifty and more years ago, wheat farmers shoveled wheat by hand from a wagon or truck to a bin for storage. Now, trucks, equipped with hydraulic lifts, lift the truck bed so the wheat runs into a box where a grain auger moves the grain to the bin for storage. Very little human effort is involved when using modern machinery to move wheat for storage purposes. The wheat farmer today can have a cab with air conditioning on the self-propelled combine; formerly little or no protection from the hot sun, as well as chaff and dust from the combine were in evidence. Farm machines are doing more and better quality of work than ever before thus cutting down on the number of farmers needed on farms. The blacksmith was a very important worker for farmers three generations and more ago. The blacksmith made implements and fixed those needing repairs. Today, it is indeed a rare sight to find a blacksmith in any rural area.

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Modern dishwashers, clothes washers, dryers, ranges, refrigerators, and air conditioners have made homemaking an easier and more enjoyable task, thus making it possible for more women to accept employment in the world of work outside of the home. Older citizens have lived their lives from the time when few automobiles were on our roads until today when states and the nation are finding streets and roads greatly overcrowded with cars.

The following important implications for a changing society due to inventions of machines and ideas may be important in elementary school social studies:

1. Pupils, particularly in historical units in the social studies, should notice how inventions and ideas changed the kinds of work that were and are performed by individuals.

2. With much change arriving continuously on the American scene, pupils need to accept change as a way of life. They should have numerous opportunities to predict and read about further changes that may come about in American society.

More knowledge is available today compared to past times. More reading materials exist for the reader than ever before. Individuals who are aware of the "explosion" of knowledge feel frustrated when entering a large library. They realize the large amount of reading materials available in different academic areas. And yet, only a very small fractional part of what is published can be read by any one individual. No doubt, reading materials will continue to increase in volume in the years to come. The social studies teacher faces an important problem in selecting important content in learning activities that are provided for pupils. The public school years are few when thinking about social studies content that pupils should understand in

order to become proficient citizens in society. Implications for the elementary school social studies program when thinking of the "explosion of knowledge" may be the following:

1. The teacher needs to select important facts, concepts, and generalizations that pupils are to realize.
2. Key, structural ideas as identified by historians, geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and political scientists, could form a basis for selecting important ideas that pupils are to realize inductively. This procedure might assist in weeding out that which is irrelevant.

3. The teacher needs to provide learning activities which help pupils not only to realize important understandings and skills, but also attitudes. Positive attitudes toward learning will guide the learner to achieve at his or her own optimum rate.

4. Pupils need to develop appropriate skills in locating information. Important content can then be located as needed from various reference sources.

5. Pupils should develop appropriate skills involving higher levels of thinking such as in concept development, critical and creative thinking, and problem solving. The methods used by social scientists such as in gathering and evaluating information may also be emphasized in a modern elementary school social studies program. Facts gained by pupils may become outdated, but the skills of higher levels of thinking will remain important in the years to come.

Pertaining to change, Doll[5] wrote:

1. Changes are being planned both in the environments within which people operate and in the individuals who occupy these environments. Changing an environment requires setting or resetting the stage for learning, and helping indiviuals to change themselves requires deep understanding of the dynamics of human behavior. Both also demand a thorough knowledge of the best practice in education.

2. Curriculum planning is being regarded as a necessary, continuing activity. There can be only incidental improvement unless we plan for it. Moreover, if teachers are not active in planning their own teaching-learning programs, ill-informed persons may soon do the planning for them.

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[5]Ronald C. Doll. Curriculum Improvement. Seventh edition. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1989, pages 24 and 25.

Disadvantaged pupils live in many areas of the United States. These are children who have not had significant background experiences that other pupils have experienced. For example, the disadvantaged pupil beginning the elementary school years may have had very limited experiences pertaining to a supermarket, a hardware store, a farm, proper health care, and other environmental situations necessary for successful living. Vocabulary growth and development, generally, will be very limited. Implications for this trend in elementary school social studies could be the following:

1. Adequate background experiences or adequate readiness needs to be provided for disadvantaged pupils when initiating and developing a unit.

2. Variety in learning activities is important to develop and maintain pupil interest, as well as to provide meaningful learnings in a unit of study.
3. The teacher needs to reward pupils who improve in performance over previous efforts; thus, all learners can experience success.

4. Purpose needs to exist on the part of the child when pursuing various learning activities.

5. Concrete learning experiences for the disadvantaged are of utmost importance.

Many pupils attend more than one elementary school during a given school year. Parents of elementary school pupils change jobs or seek advancement in new positions thus making for mobility of population. An elementary school pupil in the fifth grade, for example, might be starting a unit pertaining to Brazil. The learner moves to a different state and in the new school being attended, pupils are ending a unit on Great Britain. The child certainly discovers that sequence is lacking in experiences relating to social studies units. Or, in the sending

school, the pupil is completing a unit on Australia; in the receiving school, a new unit on Australia is just beginning as the pupil arrives. The learner may miss out on another important unit due to experiencing a complete unit on Australia again. In situations such as these, the social studies teacher's responsibility may be the following:

1. Preassess background knowledge of the newly arrived pupil prior to his/her participation in learning activities pertaining to the ongoing unit.
2. Provide learning activities which guide the pupil to develop adequate background learning relating to the parts of the unit which had ben completed prior to arrival in the receiving school.
3. Notice gaps in understandings, skills, and attitudes pertaining to important units that may not have been studied by pupils due to mobility.
4. Provide proper sequence in learning activities when teaching pupils.

Dembo[6] wrote:

> Cognitive factors--academic ability, level of cognitive development, language usage, and learning styles--play important roles in learning, but you cannot underestimate the importance of personality and motivation in the teaching-learning process. A student's personality and motivational tendencies can shape that person's academic adjustment and performance. Certain students demand modifications in teaching procedures because of such factors

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[6]Myron H. Dembo. Applying Educational Psychology in the Classroom. Third edition. White Plains, NY: Longman Inc., 1988, page 83.

> as feelings of inadequacy, poor motivation to achieve, low level of aspiration, and high anxiety. Some students do not believe that they are as good as other students , will not take risks, and will not attempt challenging tasks because they are afraid to fail or believe that failure is inevitable for them. Many other students come to school prepared for academic challenges, are highly motivated, and have the confidence to master whatever tasks are given to them. As you learn more about the students in your classroom, you will realize the extent to which noncognitive factors have an impact on learning.

Increased concern is shown for air, land, noise, and water pollution. Rivers, lakes, and streams, in many situations, have been polluted by wastes from factories, industry, and homes. Roadsides have become easy places to discard empty cans, bottles, and waste paper. Too much land has been given over to depositing worn out refrigerators, ranges, washers, and dryers, as well as empty boxes, bottles, debris, garbage, and trash. Much of this land, no doubt, becomes useful again when the discarded contents have been properly buried. However, until better methods for recycling waste products are found, too much land is being used for discarding these waste products. As another form of pollution, the internal combustion engine in automobiles and trucks, and other means of transportation has made for a large amount of air pollution. Reliable estimates indicate that approximately sixty per cent of pollution in the air comes from the use of automobiles and similar means of transportation. Factories, of course, have also contributed to problems of air pollution. What are the implications of these societal trends for the social studies curriculum?

Pupils will need to have ample units of study which pertain to the causes of air, land, noise, and water pollution. Problem solving activities are very appropriate whereby solutions to pollution are

sought. Solutions must be based on adequate knowledge; critical evaluation of each suggestion is necessary. Creative ideas are needed to solve these and other problems in American society.

More leisure time is available to workers than ever before. With machines doing much of the work that was done manually in earlier times, the average worker in American society works fewer hours per week now than formerly. The sweatshops of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when workers worked in factories from sunrise to sunset in uncomfortable surroundings are happenings of the past. Automation and inventions have eliminated the need for long hours of back-breaking work. Workers now, of course, have paid vacations. More incentives exist on the part of the worker to retire earlier with the best pension and retirement plans ever available. This means that workers have more leisure time available. No doubt, the amount of leisure time will increase in the future. Leisure time can be used profitably to enrich the individual; it can also be detrimental depending on how the leisure time is utilized.

Many pupils in the elementary school have hobbies which are worthwhile leisure type activities such as collecting coins, stamps, postcards, and rocks. These interests need to be developed further; they can become a definite part of learning experiences provided in units taught in social studies. Favorable attitudes of pupils also need to be developed and/or maintained toward reading, listening to good recordings, and visiting places of interest when taking excursions. These learning activities are a part of the social studies program.

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They are also worthwhile leisure type activities. Worthwhile leisure time interests need to be developed by learners.

Natural resources must be wisely used by all in American society. The population of the United States has now reached the 220,000,000 plus mark and continues to increase. Should the birth rate in the United States stabilize at its present level, a larger population will still result, among other reasons, due to an increase in refugees from other nations and in the life span of human beings. The increase in population has made for more farm land being utilized to build new houses in suburban areas. Much farm land each year is used in developing additional highways. At the present time there is a surplus of farm products; land can even be taken out of production for certain farm crops such as corn, wheat, and cotton. With an increase in population and a decrease in acres which are available for farming, food supplies from American farms may not be as adequate in the future.

Pupils need to develop appropriate attitudes whereby an appreciation for present day natural resources is exhibited. Excursions should be taken, if possible, to where natural resources have been conserved as well as misused. Examples of these could be the terracing of land to prevent erosion and observing directly where sheet and/or gulley erosion has occurred.

Pupils should definitely practice conserving materials used in school such as textbooks, library books, crayons, pencils, and chalk. Misused new textbooks can look old after having been in use for a few days only. Conservation of food may also be practiced by pupils in the school lunchroom.

Summary on Societal Trends and the Social Studies

Societal trends help determine specific units that may be taught in social studies. There must be ample justifications for each unit that is taught. Time that is spent in determining the justification for teaching specific units is time that is well spent. This would assist in weeding out unimportant units which is so necessary with the ever increasing amount of knowledge available to human beings. Teachers and supervisors of social studies should be scholars pertaining to understanding societal trends and determining what these trends mean in curriculum development.

Good human relations, problem solving, critical thinking, and creative thinking are important skills for pupils to develop to become effective citizens in a democracy. These skills are important in American society.

Problems for Consideration and Discussion

1. In surveying recent textbooks pertaining to the teaching of elementary school social studies, which principles of learning that teachers should follow when teaching pupils are mentioned most frequently? How would you implement each of these guidelines in the social studies curriculum?

2. Study the headlines and content of several major, reputable newspapers for a week or two. According to your thinking, what significance in this study is there for teaching specific units in elementary school social studies?

3. Visit at least two elementary school classrooms to observe the teaching of social studies. Which principles of learning are followed, as well as violated, according to your observations?

4. In selecting and evaluating several curriculum guides, what indications are there that present day societal trends were studied and utilized in developing the elementary school social studies sections?

5. In evaluating several resource units, what indications are there that appropriate principles of learning were used in the selection of learning activities in elementary school social studies?

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